

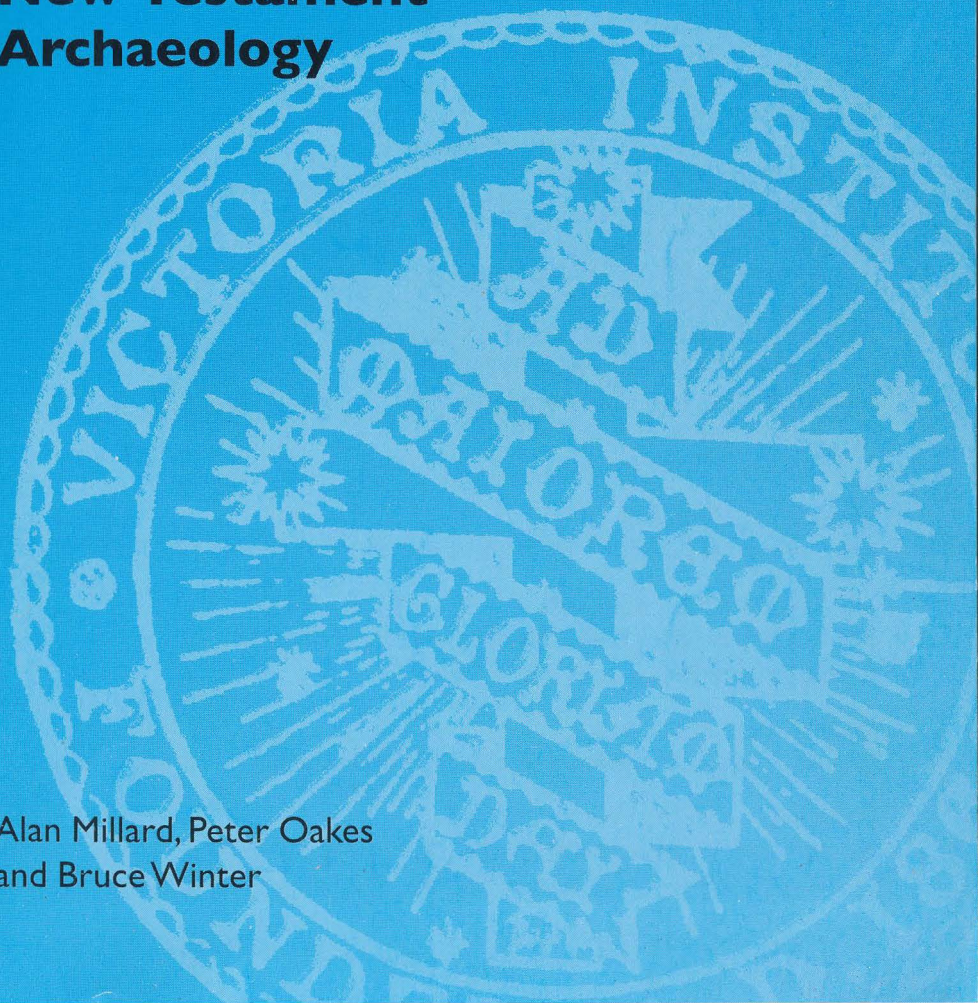
Faith & Thought



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New Testament Archaeology

Alan Millard, Peter Oakes
and Bruce Winter



FAITH and THOUGHT

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Contents

Editorial		1
Prize Essay		2
Book Review		3
The Frst Christians - Archaeologically Invisible?	Professor Alan Millard	5
Who Were the Philippians?	Dr. Peter Oakes	15
Corinth off the Rocks	Dr. Bruce Winter	22
Faith and Thought - Application for Enrolment		32

Editorial

The articles in this edition of the journal were given at the Faith and Thought Symposium 'Archaeology and the New Testament' held on 6th October 2007. A fourth paper was delivered by Dr. John Kane on the subject of 'Palestinian Archaeology and the New Testament' which we hope to publish at a future date.

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Book Review

Keith J. Hacking *Signs and Wonders: Then and Now*. 2006 Nottingham Apollos pb.14.99 301pp. ISBN 978.1.84474.149.6.

‘Do miracles happen now?’ is a question that has fascinated Christians since the end of the apostolic era and is the subject of the Victoria Institute Symposium taking place as this issue of the journal is published. Towards the end of the twentieth century the charismatic movement influenced virtually every branch of the Christian Church and brought with it a renewed interest in miracles and ‘signs and wonders’. One of the most significant groups was the so-called ‘Third Wave’ associated with the late John Wimber, who travelled the world, encouraging Christians to ‘do the stuff’, that is to perform signs and wonders in the power of the Holy Spirit. The third wave received prominence, not only because those who were involved in the movement had previously been ‘cessationists’ who believed that signs and wonders had ceased at the end of the apostolic era, but also because Wimber taught at the prestigious Fuller Theological Seminary and sought to put his teaching on a firm academic footing.

Wimber claimed that Jesus demonstrated the presence of the Kingdom of God by signs and wonders, which included healings and exorcisms and that the whole point in making disciples was to enable the disciples to continue this work. Modern ‘charismatic leaders’ are the heirs of the apostles and are expected to reproduce such supernatural events in the present day. In this book Keith Hacking critically examines the thesis by a thorough examination of all the New Testament passages. Unlike Wimber and his supporters he does not assume the Gospels and Acts form a homogenous whole, but that they must be seen within their literary context where each writer adapts his material to the need of his specific audience.

Matthew’s Gospel contains the passage about the keys of the Kingdom and the authority, given to Peter, ‘to bind and loose’ and ends with the great commission to make disciples of all the nations. However Hacking points out that these passages must be seen in the context of Matthew’s picture of Jesus as the Mosaic prophet who rightly interprets the law and who understands a disciple as someone who learns, understands and obeys the words of Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is highly critical of charismatic teachers whose works are not rooted in Jesus’ teaching (Matt.7.21-3). Hacking writes, “Matthew clearly subordinates healings and exorcisms to doing God’s will, even when they are performed in Jesus’ name (Matt.7.21-23)... the contemporary model for healings/exorcisms suggested here is one where the invocation of Jesus’ name is practised in a (formal?) setting ... this could never be at the expense of subordinating what truly characterizes Christian discipleship to simply ‘doing the stuff’!”(101)

The author argues that, in Mark, signs and wonders authenticate the message and mission of the church and he portrays the disciples as sometimes lacking in

4 FAITH AND THOUGHT

understanding and power to work miracles, as in the case of the epileptic boy. Much is made by the third wave theologians of the ending of Mark (16.9-20) which stresses the signs and wonders that will accompany believers. The force of their argument, however, is undermined by the fact that it is now universally accepted that this was not originally part of the Gospel and therefore lacks the authority of the Gospel as a whole.

Finally Hacking discusses Luke-Acts and shows that the author of that work draws a sharp distinction between the earthly ministry of Jesus and the experience of the New Testament Church after Pentecost. He also points out that, although there are many signs and wonders done by Jesus' followers in the Acts, these are performed by a limited number of individuals who were specifically set apart and commissioned for this task. We should not, therefore, conclude that Luke is giving credence to the belief that all Christians who are baptised in the Holy Spirit will perform signs and wonders.

It might be assumed that Hacking does not believe that the contemporary church can expect to see signs and wonders performed. This is not the case. Although he argues, on the basis of the evidence from the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, that we cannot expect them to be normative in the lives of all Christians, he does believe that we must remain open to God's sovereign activity in history. He concludes, "In terms of contemporary application of the overall results gained from our study, it is fair to say that the church in the twenty-first century must remain open to God's sovereign activity, which may on occasion extend to the validation of individuals and their ministry through signs and wonders." (257-8) Although the book started out as a Ph.D thesis the author has sufficiently re-worked it to make it accessible to the ordinary reader and it is to be highly commended.

Reviewed by Reg. Luhman

The First Christians – Archaeologically Invisible?

Alan Millard

When did the Christian church begin? That question has an easy answer because there are numerous books written in the first, second, third and fourth centuries that state clearly in began in the first century. Yet no original copies of those books survive, we rely on the work of generations of copyists. Did they copy reliable records, or were they preserving fictional propaganda created to support a new religion? What physical, material evidence is there for the existence of Christianity in the first and second centuries? That is the question at the heart of this study, which arises from an interest in the relationship between written texts and material remains.

Following Constantine the Great's edict in A.D. 313, Christianity became a legal religion in the Roman Empire, so churches were built and Christians could proclaim their faith publicly. They did so in many ways across Europe and around the Mediterranean lands. Christian symbols were carved on coffins and painted on walls, stamped on coins and engraved on tableware. These public statements of faith joined others, as pagan temples could be found everywhere, with statues of gods and goddesses, dating from the centuries before Constantine's edict. Synagogues and emblems of the Jewish faith could also be seen in many places reaching back to earlier times, in stone and mosaic, on the triumphal Arch of Titus of the first century and in Jerusalem, scratched on the plaster of a wall in a house destroyed in A.D. 70 and stamped on coins of Mattathias Antigonus, who ruled from 40 to 37 B.C. As an illicit religion, we should not expect traces of the Christian faith to be so evident, yet surely something should survive from the start. The obvious emblems, the chi-rho monogram and the cross, occur widely, but few examples, if any, date before the year 300. What is there to be seen?

Traditional Sites

The obvious places to begin with are the traditional sacred sites. There are many places which have been associated with persons or events at the start of Christianity over many centuries, centres of pilgrimage for the faithful. A few have strong credentials. Constantine the Great's mother, the devout queen Helena, persuaded him to mark some of them, so local Christians were asked to locate them. Should those traditions current in the fourth century be given credence to-day? Tradition may be strong and long-lived, yet without firm, independent testimony, it cannot be more than plausible and the archaeologist will not be satisfied with that.

For the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, marking the site of Christ's birth, there can be no corroborative witness. At the time of Jesus' birth, no-one was interested in noting its location, nor is it likely that his mother, Mary, should return over thirty years later to identify the spot. Tradition is the only ground the church can claim in its favour.

6 FAITH AND THOUGHT

A more convincing case can be made in favour of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, marking the burial place of Jesus in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. Tombs used by well-to-do Jews in the Jerusalem area prior to A.D. 70 followed a standard pattern and numerous examples are known from accidental discovery and from archaeological excavations. A room was hollowed out of the rock, often a hillside, with a bench cut at about waist height. From the bench or the floor tunnels ran into the walls for about two metres, six feet. The bodies of the dead were placed in the tunnels for a year or so, and then the bones were collected and placed in boxes of wood or stone, ossuaries, sometimes bearing the names of the dead. At the heart of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands the traditional site of the tomb in which Jesus' body was laid. At the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, bishop Macarius of Jerusalem asked Constantine to dig up the tomb. The workmen were directed to a point in Jerusalem where the emperor Hadrian had built a forum and temple of Aphrodite when he established his new city of Aelia Capitolina in A.D. 135, after crushing the Second Jewish Revolt. The men dug and, the contemporary church historian Eusebius, relates, 'Behold, the place which had witnessed the Resurrection of the Saviour appeared, surpassing all hopes'. The surrounding rock was cut away to leave the tomb isolated, as it stands to-day in the centre of a rotunda. Although that destroyed everything immediately adjacent, the outer wall of the rotunda cut through a tomb of first century Jewish type and part of it exists outside the wall. For some centuries it has been called the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Lesser traces of other tombs of the same type exist elsewhere in the building. The Church is situated within the sixteenth century city wall, but the site was obviously beyond the wall before A.D. 70, for it was forbidden to bury within the wall. The question is, 'How could the fourth century Christians be sure they had the right tomb?' Unless Christians in Jerusalem during the first and second centuries had placed a mark on the rock and guarded the knowledge after Titus captured the city and then continued to respect the place before Hadrian built the forum and temple of Aphrodite, there is no way Constantine's subjects could have been sure. Eusebius does not mention any decisive inscription. Possibly a tomb came to light in the area tradition remembered and that was sufficient: a tomb was needed, a tomb was discovered, so that was the tomb everyone knew should be there! In the seventh century the pilgrim Arculf travelled from France to visit the sacred sites. He reported that inside the tomb there was 'a single shelf stretching from head to foot without division, which would take one person lying on his back. It is like a cave with its opening facing the south part of the tomb and is made with a low roof over it'. That description fits well with first century tombs of a richer type with an arched recess (an *arcosolium*) for a body or a coffin. The tomb of Joseph of Arimathea might have had such a recess, but there can be no certainty that the tomb Arculf saw was actually his tomb.

In the Holy Land there are other 'holy sites' which pilgrims customarily visit, but which, as is well known, have very dubious pedigrees, some being rivals, Places said to be

associated with the ministry of Jesus cannot come into consideration, unless there are signs of very early Christian use, i.e. prior to A.D. 200. One site has gained prominence in recent decades and figures in at least one popular guidebook as having special significance from a very early date.¹ That is Peter's House at Capernaum, where the Franciscans excavated about forty years ago. Built among the remains of small houses of Hellenistic and Roman times, they claimed to have found a 'house church,' built by supposed Judaeo-Christians to mark the site of Peter's house. Christians supposedly visited the site from the late first century onward, leaving numerous Greek and other graffiti. Reviews of the Franciscans' work by other archaeologists have shown that their interpretations are based on eccentric and wrong assumptions about Judaeo-Christians living in the region – they did not exist - and on misunderstanding of the archaeological deposits. There is no good reason for dating the so-called 'house church' before the fourth century and no evidence at all for 'Judaeo-Christians' living in the area. The very fragmentary Aramaic graffiti are better read as Greek than as Aramaic; as the excavators wanted, and do not necessarily have religious significance.² The site may have retained a folk-memory from the first century to the fourth, but there is no way the claims of its excavators can be upheld.

Similarly, the early history of the most famous Christian site in Rome, the Tomb of Saint Peter, is uncertain. Constantine the Great ordered the construction of the church sometime in the 320s. The work involved the creation of a huge artificial platform on the slope of the Vatican hill, incorporating parts of a Roman cemetery with mausolea. The focus of the church was the shrine said to mark the tomb of Saint Peter. This area of the church has been remodelled several times, lastly by Bernini in the sixteenth century. Below the traditional site, excavations undertaken during the Second World War uncovered the ruins of a considerable number of well-built Roman tombs of the first and second centuries, with a redplastered stone wall defining part of a small open area. In the soil of that area were several burials from the first half of the second century and possibly earlier. The whole area was badly disturbed by later church constructions. In the Red Wall were traced meagre, battered remains of a structure called the Aedicula. When the wall was being built, about the year 160, a niche was hacked out of its footings below ground, while, above ground level, there was a purpose built niche with a slab resting on two pillars. The reason for hacking the niche out of the foundations is apparently to be explained by the presence of something that had to be taken into account. The suggestion that it was a burial which the builders had disturbed is attractive, although no burial was found directly related to these niches. It may simply be that the builders began to create the niche then found it was below the required ground level and left it unfinished. The excavators recorded a number of graffiti at various points, including one or two that mention Peter. They probably date from the time in the fourth century when Constantine's workmen uncovered the area as they constructed his church. Evidently by the beginning of the fourth century there was a firm belief that St

8 FAITH AND THOUGHT

Peter was buried there, and that belief may have been much older. Indeed, Eusebius cites a Roman presbyter, Gaius, who claimed, 'I can show you the monuments (tropeia) of the Apostles. For if you go to the Vatican (Hill) or to the Ostian Way, there you will find the monuments of those who founded this church'.³ Gaius was alive during the episcopate of Zephyrinus in Rome, 199-217. At the Church of San Sebastiano, to which the bodies of Peter and Paul were said to have been taken in 258 at the time of the persecution by Valerian, more than two hundred Christian graffiti have been found in a cemetery area, from the later part of the third century. Yet nothing proves that either site was a Christian shrine at an earlier date. The existence of that belief at that time does not prove that St Peter's relics were there or had ever been there. The strength of the tradition is the only evidence.⁴

Traces of Christian presence

From the third century there are clear traces of Christian activity in several regions. In Rome there are catacombs containing burials with Christian signs or inscriptions, among them the burials of several bishops of Rome, such as Pontian, martyred in 235. Whether the paintings of Christian scenes on the walls of the catacombs were made as early as the third century is uncertain, but Christians were painting pictures on walls far away at that time. On the edge of the Empire, at Dura-Europos, on the mid-Euphrates in present-day Syria, there was a synagogue with pictures of biblical scenes on the walls, and also a house which had been turned into a church about the year 232 and destroyed by Persian invaders in 256. Both had been buried beneath a later defensive bank and so were well preserved. The house church was clearly shown to be a Christian establishment by graffiti on the walls invoking Christ, using the peculiar abbreviation XN also found in early Christian manuscripts. The building included a baptistery and painted walls, one with a scene of Christ healing the paralytic. The distinction between the synagogue and the house church is clear. A clearly Christian inscription from the beginning of the third century was found by Sir William Ramsay in 1883 in Turkey, at Hieropolis in Phrygia. It is part of a stone slab engraved with the epitaph of a man named Avercius, who died in 216. It tells of his visit to Rome and of his Christian faith and practice, using a style of figurative language which is reflected in 9 the paintings in the catacombs. For example, 'there was handed to me everywhere as nourishment the Fish from the spring, the pure fish of great size caught by the chaste Virgin. And she continued to hand on this fare to the friends who eat, giving wholesome wine, offering mingled wine and water with bread.'⁵ The Fish stands for Christ and the wine and bread are obviously the Eucharist, but there is no mention of the name of Jesus that might immediately draw hostile eyes to damage the monument. Although the stone is broken, a Life of Avercius, written in the fourth century includes the whole text, enabling restorations to be made to the original. The epitaph ends with an injunction against placing anyone else in the tomb, anyone who does so should pay large sums to the 'treasure chest of Rome' and to the town of Hieropolis, echoing a very ancient pattern of penalties.

Turning to the second century, rare discoveries have been made in Rome that may indicate a Christian presence. Although the fashion for burial in catacombs began in the second half of the century, there is as yet no satisfactory, first hand evidence for Christians using them so early. Like Jews, Christians may have been buried in pagan cemeteries at first.⁶

Late in the second century someone scratched an insulting graffito on a wall in Rome. It depicts a man in front of a cross on which is a human figure with a donkey's head. Below are the words, in Greek, 'Anaxamenos reveres his god'. The grounds for assuming that this is a mockery directed against Christian worship of the crucified Jesus is strong, but they are not conclusive; a more specific, local occasion may be intended.

Reaching back into the first century, various scholars have identified early Christian artefacts. Five command attention.

1. To the south of Jerusalem, in Talpioth, a tomb was uncovered in the 1930s which contained several ossuaries, some inscribed. The tomb was in use prior to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. On the two of the ossuaries the excavator read lightly scratched words as 'Jesus, woe' and 'Jesus, alas'.⁷ If his reading were correct, then these boxes could attest the presence of Christians in Jerusalem earlier than 70. However, the words could be a lament for two dead men each named Jesus, one of the most common Jewish names at that time. In 1971 John Kane demonstrated that those readings are improbable. Rather, the first should be read 'Jesus, son of Judas' and the second 'Jesus, son of Aloth'.⁸

2. Among the manuscripts found in caves near the Dead Sea is a group of tiny pieces of papyrus bearing writing in Greek, found by themselves in Cave 7. There is no good reason to doubt that they were deposited at the same time as the Dead Sea Scrolls about the year 66-67, in the face of the Roman advance. In 1972 J. O'Callaghan proposed the identification of some of them as pieces of New Testament books. Although his ideas were immediately challenged, shown to be unlikely and rejected by all scholars competent to judge, they were resuscitated and vigorously propagated by the late C. P. Thiede. He concentrated on one fragment, 7Q5, asserting it is part of a copy of Mark's Gospel (6: 52, 53), in line with O'Callaghan. Obviously if the contention could be proved, it could imply that Mark's Gospel was written before the First Jewish Revolt of 67-70, which would upset conventional New Testament scholarship. Despite involving high-powered microscopy and forensic scientists to bolster his case, Thiede has not persuaded experts in papyrology or textual studies. Other fragments found with 7Q5 are from the Greek text of Exodus and the apocryphal book of Baruch, while some fit well with parts of the text of the pseudepigraphical Book of Enoch, so it is reasonable to suppose 7Q5 belongs to one of the same works; it cannot be recognized as part of a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. When we recall that the Dead Sea Scrolls include books unknown to modern scholarship before 1947, we have to be ready to admit that we may not be able

10 FAITH AND THOUGHT

to identify every piece discovered and so should not force one to fit, as Thiede did.⁹

3. The same C. P. Thiede also claimed an ancient piece of wood in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome is, as tradition says, part of the notice fixed to the cross of Jesus, the *Titulus crucis*, inscribed at the command of Pontius Pilate in Aramaic, Greek and Latin.¹⁰ In its present state, the walnut plank measures 25 by 14 cms (about 10 x 6 inches). Only the tails of the Aramaic or Hebrew letters remain in the first line, then several words of Greek and Latin in the next two lines, strangely engraved from right to left, like the Semitic script. Thiede explained that a local man who was unfamiliar with Greek and Latin prepared the plaque. Now the Gospels do not say how the words were written on the wood, and, in fact, it was usual for the accusation which was carried in front of the condemned man after a Roman trial to be painted on a whitened board. The lettering is in a first century style, according to Thiede. Others disagree, one epigraphist placing it no earlier than the second century. Of course, there is no way to prove the object is the authentic *titulus*. If the Carbon 14 test were applied, it could tell when the wood was cut from the tree, but not when it was engraved. Only if it gave a date after A.D. 33 would it be significant, and, actually, when the test was applied, six samples gave dates between about 1,000 and 1,100 A.D!¹¹

4. Longer known and often reproduced is a mark on the wall of a house in Herculaneum, the Italian town near to Pompeii, which was engulfed in liquid mud when Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79. The mark is an irregular cross shape left in the plaster of a wall when something was removed or destroyed. It stands above a carbonized wooden cupboard, which has sometimes been labelled as an altar. Neither the form nor the contents of the cupboard indicate a religious use. As for the mark on the wall, it is not the shape of a regular cross; it could well have been a fixture for holding a picture, a shelf, or something else on to the wall.

5. At Pompeii were found two graffiti of the famous SATOR or ROTAS square, one scratched on the wall of a private house, the other on a pillar in a public exercise yard. This palindrome appears at sites across the Roman Empire in later centuries. One example was scratched on a sherd from a large jar of the late second century excavated in Manchester, while another was carefully scratched on a plastered wall at Cirencester and four examples were found at Dura Europos. All sorts of ingenious explanations have been offered for this remarkable square. On the principle that the simplest explanation is the best, unravelling it as a Christian text gains first place. With the N at the centre, the other letters can be re-arranged in a cross shape to read PATERNOSTER horizontally and vertically, with A and O (omega) at each end.¹² If this is correct, there were people in Pompeii who knew at least the first words of the Lord's Prayer in Latin before 79. However, certainty cannot be reached; the discovery of an example definitely dated before the year 33 would rule out the Christian interpretation. A recent study argues, on the basis of Pythagorean mathematics, that the square conceals parts of a Latin inscription. It refers to the bronze altar of Exodus 27 and the bronze serpent of Numbers

21 as identification markers and symbols of salvation for the Jewish Diaspora.¹³ That seems to me to be more complicated than we might expect!

These five examples have been hailed as signs of Christian presence during the first century in the towns where they have been found. As I have tried to show, some of them can be discounted and not one of them can be treated as beyond doubt.

Across the Roman Empire, therefore, from Britain to Palestine, the archaeologist cannot claim to have found physical evidence for Christianity anywhere in the first century and only dubious examples from the second. It is in the third century that material remains can clearly be identified as Christian and patently Christian inscriptions appear. Does the lack of material evidence for Christian activity during the first and second centuries imply that the assertions of ancient writers are unreliable; Christianity did not exist, or hardly existed, was a very minor movement, then?

It is written documents that challenge that conclusion, not works handed down through centuries of copying, but Christian manuscripts of the third and second centuries discovered in Egypt. Now the main inhabited area of Egypt lies along the valley of the River Nile and on its delta. There, it is has to be emphasized, the physical circumstances, the high water table and damp atmosphere, prevent the survival of papyri in Alexandria, the capital of Roman Egypt, or in several other major towns. Beyond the ribbon of the river, a width of about twelve miles at most, there is only desert, apart from a few oases. In antiquity some settlements did lie a little way away from the river, especially on a tributary know now as Bahr Yusif, which ran parallel to the Nile, emptying into the Fayyum Depression, south-west of Cairo. When, in the fourth century, the water supplies gradually failed, the inhabitants deserted those settlements, leaving unwanted books and papers in their abandoned houses and basketsful of paper in the rubbish tips. The tens of thousands of papyri rescued from such places since the nineteenth century include a number of Christian ones, mostly fragmentary. Publication of these papyri is continuing and pieces of Christian books continue to be identified. The most recent volume of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* includes two fragments from John's Gospel dated to the earlier half of the third century.¹⁴ Over seventy Christian papyri and a handful of texts on parchment written or copied in the third century have been catalogued. On papyrus there are pages from about three dozen copies of New Testament books or groups of books, parts of 30 or so Greek Old Testament books or groups of books, there are pieces from four books of New Testament apocrypha (*Gospel of Mary*, *Acts of Peter*, *Acts of Paul* in two copies), half a dozen copies of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, five copies from works of the great scholar Origen, who flourished from about 185 to 254, and a volume containing 1 Peter and other writings in Coptic. This amount of material, dated palaeographically from the start to the end of the third century, attests the activity of Christian scribes in Egypt. Whether they were scattered across the land, or based in one or two centres, their productions are hardly the propaganda of a very newly invented religion; they had a history behind them. Half a dozen fragments of New Testament

12 FAITH AND THOUGHT

books on papyrus are dated to the very beginning of the third century, but from the whole of the second century there are far fewer Christian papyri. They are five pieces of New Testament books, a piece with Old Testament texts and two pieces of 'apocryphal' or extra-canonical gospels. The Rylands University Library in Manchester holds the scrap usually considered to be the oldest of all, part of a page from the Gospel of John which may have been copied as early as 150. Occasional attempts to assign some Christian papyri to the first century have not convinced competent and experienced scholars.¹⁵ In this and other studies, it is safer to follow the more conservative dates reached by leading palaeographers.

These papyri exhibit features which distinguish them from the majority of Greek papyrus books. They take the form of the codex rather than the roll, some aspects of the writing make them more like administrative documents than literary works and, most distinctively, they have a peculiar way of abbreviating certain key words, notably God, Lord, Jesus and Christ (the *nomina sacra*). They did not take the first two or three letters, as was normal for Greek scribes, but the first and last letters, so Christ might appear as X C, XN, XY, XΩ. Recently, Larry Hurtado has brought to notice another idiosyncrasy: in words relating to the Crucifixion, some scribes added to the Greek letter *tau* (T) a loop atop its vertical, giving the appearance of a head, like a diagram of a man on a cross.¹⁶

The universality of these features in the oldest known Christian manuscripts reveals a convention which most copyists followed and so points to a respected authority who had set the pattern at an earlier moment. There is no way of knowing who that was, or when, although Antioch has been speculatively suggested as the location.¹⁷ While they are limited to patently Christian books, they can hardly be treated as public displays to draw attention to the faith, for only the initiated would recognize them. Indeed, the system of abbreviation may have been intended to obscure patently Christian terms.

The conclusion from these considerations is plain: there are no identifiably and indubitably Christian remains older than the third century, apart from written documents. Those are the Christian papyri and the statements in Christian, Jewish and pagan books surviving in later copies. Noteworthy is the absence of any buildings, utensils, equipment, decoration or jewellery with Christian motifs in contrast to pagan and Jewish motifs; writing alone testifies to a Christian presence. In the circumstances of frequent persecution which prevailed throughout most of the first and second centuries, Christians naturally avoided proclaiming their presence in material ways. As they grew in number, strength and influence, their presence begins to be traceable in archaeological remains of the third century, even though persecutions occurred.

Why has virtually nothing been found that can be identified as produced by or belonging to early Christians? In addition to the danger of persecution, the possibilities inherent in the accidents of survival and discovery may play some role, although it is odd that Egypt has yielded no objects to set beside the papyri. The more likely explanation lies

in the common culture the Christians shared with their pagan neighbours. No differences would appear in their dress or their homes, their tools or other equipment that would distinguish them. If the ruined houses showed the occupants lived in less luxury, were more abstemious in their eating and drinking would that enable the archaeologist to label them 'Christians'? In Roman society the absence of a household shrine might be significant, but that would presumably also be true of a Jewish home. Only written information could identify ownership.

The differences between the early Christians and their neighbours lay in the intangible and largely invisible areas of life, in ethics, in morals and in religious faith. New Testament writings and slightly later Christian texts explain that. The early second century *Epistle to Diognetus* 5 expresses it as follows: 'The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practise any eccentric way of life. ... They pass their lives in whatever township, of Greeks or barbarians, each man's lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet and other habits.'¹⁸

Ultimately, it is written documents alone which can prove the presence of Christians in the first two centuries. As the climate and other physical circumstances prevent the survival of parchment and papyrus or wooden tablets in most parts of the Roman empire, apart from Egypt, we have to rely on the reports in texts passed down through scribal tradition, both Christian and non-Christian. The latter include the comments of the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius about the persecution of Christians on account of the fire in Rome in A.D. 64 and the request Pliny the Younger, when governor of Bithynia about the year 111, sent to the emperor Trajan for advice on how he should treat Christians, giving a summary of their worship. There is good reason to accept them as witnesses to Christians in the capital and spread elsewhere, to Bithynia, at least, during the first century. The aim of this study has been to show how knowledge of the existence of Christians and their activity in the first two centuries rests on textual evidence alone. Archaeological research, investigating the material remains, cannot trace a Christian presence anywhere in that period with assurance. To the archaeologist, concerned with the physical and material, the Christians of the first two centuries are indeed invisible!

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14 FAITH AND THOUGHT

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Who were the Philippians?

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When Paul arrives in Philippi in Acts 16, why does Luke bother telling us that the town is 'a colony' (Acts 16.12)? This means a Roman colony. Before and after Acts 16, Paul visits several of these, such as Pisidian Antioch and Corinth, but Luke does not point out that they were colonies. One answer is that Luke sees the Roman-ness of Philippi as being crucial in what then takes place. When Paul is dragged before the town magistrates after exorcising a demon from a slave girl who gave prophecies, the crowd accuse him and Silas of being Jews who are 'proclaiming customs that it is not lawful for us to receive or practise, being Romans' (Acts 16.20). The point then gets thrown back in the face of the colonial authorities by Paul after his eventful night in and out of prison. Word is sent to let Paul and Silas, go but Paul objects to the manner of their release: '...having beaten us in public, without having been condemned, despite being Romans, they threw us into prison - and now they want to get rid of us secretly?!' (Acts 16.37). Illegal public humiliation should be matched by public vindication.

Having seen this, some Roman features of Philippians start looking significant. Paul reflects on his situation under arrest in Rome (or, as some scholars argue, Ephesus). His first point is about the unexpected way in which his imprisonment has benefited the gospel. In particular, he says that '...it has become known throughout the praetorium, and to all the others, that my chains are for Christ' (Phil. 1.13). This is probably a reference to the Praetorian Guard at Rome (an alternative possibility is a provincial Roman governor's residence). At the other end of the letter, Paul picks out a group from which to bring particular greetings: 'All the saints greet you, especially those from Caesar's household' (Phil. 4.22). 'Caesar's household' does not mean the Emperor's sisters, cousins and aunts. It is a wider term that includes the Emperor's slaves and freed slaves. This was a large number of people, spread around the empire although most numerous at Rome, who worked for the Emperor in various capacities, including many that we would think of as civil service positions. If Philippi is a Roman colony, should we see Paul as mentioning these Roman institutions because the hearers of the letter are Romans?

This is a line that has been taken by many commentators on Philippians. Since it is well known that the particular kind of colony at Philippi consisted of veteran soldiers, some commentators have also assumed that a substantial number of the letter's hearers would have been veterans. However, these assumptions are unrealistic. Consider the names of the Philippian Christians that are mentioned in the NT. When Paul came to Philippi, among his hearers was '...a certain woman named Lydia, a purple-dealer from the city of Thyatira' (Acts 16, 14). In Philippians, the event that may be the immediate cause of the letter being sent is that Paul has 'decided it is necessary to send

Epaphroditus ...back to you' (Phil. 2.25). Towards the end of the letter he intervenes in a quarrel: 'I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree with one another in the Lord' (Phil. 4.2). In dealing with this issue he commends the work for the gospel that these two did with him 'and also with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers' (Phil. 4.3). The names are those of three Greek women, one Greek man and one Roman man. How does this fit with Philippi being a Roman colony? Were people with Greek names actually quite likely to be Roman colonists? If not, how come there were Greeks in a Roman colony, and what would it be like being in that position?

The issue of Roman-ness is important in Philippians. As well as the question of why Paul brings in references to the praetorium and Caesar's household, consider Paul's assertion in Phil. 3.20: 'for our citizenship is in heaven'. (The word *politeuma*, which is here translated as 'citizenship', is difficult to express in English. It probably means some kind of political entity, such as a state – although that concept is not quite a first-century one. However, whatever it means, it does imply that the Philippian Christians belong to – are citizens of – another place.) Are his hearers Roman citizens, in which case Paul is telling them about another citizenship that they have, and is urging them to prioritize that citizenship over their earthly one? Or are they not citizens at all, so Paul is offering the hope of a great citizenship to those who have none? To take another prominent issue in the letter: when Paul places stress on Christ's lordship, and the universality of submission to him (Phil. 2.10), how would this sound to Greeks living in a Roman colony? Would they hear a comparison with the Roman emperor? If so, what would they infer from it? We will try to understand the context at Philippi better, in order to put us in a better position to think about these and similar questions.

Philippi Before the Roman Colonisation

Philippi lies in an area of what is now north-eastern Greece, about half way between Thessaloniki and the Turkish border. Up to the middle of the fourth century BC, the main inhabitants of the area were various tribes such as the Edoni and the Pieri. Although these groups came more from the west than the east, they ended up having close affinities (and getting mixed) with the main group to the east, the Thracians, who occupied the area that largely corresponds to modern Bulgaria. These Thracian and Thracian-related groups were still very noticeable in the area around the town of Philippi in Paul's day, although not so much within the town itself. Archaeologically, they are visible in inscriptions which have rather un-Greek and un-Roman names, and in carved reliefs of a horseman riding to the right, towards a tree, around which a snake is wrapped. This figure is called the Thracian Rider. He is viewed as a hero (a divinised dead person) or a god and is ubiquitous in north-eastern Greece.

In 360 BC, a colony called Krenides ('Springs') was set up by people from Thasos, a powerful city state based on an island a few kilometres from the port city of Neapolis. The settlers, led by an Athenian exile named Kallistratos, set up their colony about 13 km inland, to the north-west of the port. They have left little archaeological trace apart

from the occasional coin and gravestone. This is because, only four years later, in 356 BC, they needed to call in the help of Philip II of Macedon, in order to fight off attacks by Thracians.

Philip was impressed by the location of the settlement, especially when he discovered that the hills behind it contained very substantial deposits of gold. He decided to re-found the place as a Macedonian colony. He built substantial walls enclosing an area about 1km by 0.7 km, with a secure acropolis (fortified hilltop) at one corner and with the opposite corner reaching the edge of a huge marsh, which was not fully drained until the middle of the twentieth century. He also built a large theatre in the Greek style, cut into the side of the hill on which the acropolis stood. The city was named after him. The earliest preserved decree of his son, Alexander the Great, is an inscription from Philippi, regulating the division of control of agricultural land between the Macedonian colonists and the Thracians. Drainage of some of the marsh-land began and Philippi flourished as both an agricultural and a mining town.

Apart from the walls and the theatre, the quantity of archaeological evidence from this Hellenistic period of Philippi's existence is not as great as one might expect. The most substantial finds have been some funerary monuments associated with venerating particular dead people as heroes (see above). The most striking *heroon* is very mystifying, although not in itself: the odd thing is that this monument ended up becoming the underground central point of the first major Christian church building, an octagonal structure dating from the fourth century AD. Apart from these monuments, the main evidence of Hellenistic Philippi lies in inscriptions at various places around Greece which list delegations that arrived for various civic and religious festivals. A number mention delegations from Philippi. There are also a few literary references to Philippi in this period, the last being from the time of the Mithridatic wars in the first century BC.

The Arrival of the Roman Colonists

Some commentators see the Roman colonisation of Philippi, which happened mainly in two waves, in 42 BC and 30 BC, as fairly benign. This is bound to be far from the truth. The colony was established immediately after the battle of Philippi in which Mark Antony and Octavian (later Augustus) defeated Cassius and Brutus, who had been using the city as a base. Before the battle, Antony and Octavian had agreed to carve up land from eighteen wealthy cities in Italy, to give as a reward to their retiring soldiers. After the battle, they decided to add Philippi as a nineteenth colony. Even in Italy, the process was so brutal as to provoke mass outrage. Appian writes,

The task of assigning the soldiers to their colonies and dividing the land was one of exceeding difficulty. For the soldiers demanded the cities which had been selected for them before the war as prizes for their valour, and the cities demanded that the whole of Italy should share the burden, or that the

cities should cast lots with other cities, and that those who gave the land should be paid the value of it: and there was no money.

They came to Rome in crowds, young and old, women and children, to the forum and the temples, uttering lamentations, saying that they had done no wrong for which they, Italians, should be driven from their fields and their hearthstones, like people conquered in war. (*Civil Wars* V,12, tr. H. White)

Colonisation in the one place outside Italy, a town that was a base for the ‘rebels’, must have been completely ruthless. The farmland around the town was ‘centuriated’ – divided up into rectangles – and allocated by lot to a couple of thousand demobilised legionaries. Some scholars imagine that very few Greeks (or Thracians) had previously been living off that land. Such a ‘myth of the empty land’ is common in colonial discourse. It is particularly unlikely to have applied at Philippi because flat, fertile land such as that around Philippi is in very short supply in Greece, especially land with excellent communications, along the long-established Via Egnatia, and centred on the town with the best facilities for miles around.

The Social Effects of the Roman Colonisation

Before 42 BC, Philippi was run by a Greek elite, who owned most of the land. All of the land was farmed by Greeks or Thracians. Many of the Greeks will have lived in the town and commuted to their farms. Such commuting farmers were the back-bone of most Greek towns. As well as farmers there will have been Greek craftworkers and other groups providing goods and services to the elite, the farmers, and each other. Free-born Greeks will have made up the town’s citizen body.

After 42 BC, the Greek elite disappears almost entirely. This is different from most Roman colonies in Greece, such as Corinth, where some elite Greeks remain visible in the inscriptional record. A Roman elite entirely takes over the running of the town, which is now governed purely according to Roman law. The Roman veteran soldiers all, in principle, become commuting farmers, replacing all the Greek ones. The Greek peasant farmers had to either rent land off the Romans, if it was available, or try to switch to other activities such as craft work. Since the population of Philippi grew sharply at this period, there will at least have been robust demand for goods and services – although it is clear that some of that demand ended up being met by people from further away, such as Lydia, who moved to Philippi from Asia Minor to trade in purple dye. The Romans will also have brought a new element into the population of Philippi, a significant number of slaves. The citizen body of Philippi will now have been made up almost exclusively of Roman settlers and any freed slaves. As Adrian Sherwin-White has shown, it was almost unknown for significant numbers of Greeks to be given citizenship in such a process of colonisation.

Between 42 BC and the middle of the first century AD, when Philippians was written, the social structure of the town would have gradually shifted somewhat. The Roman

elite remains but there would be fewer Roman commuting farmers, as some veterans or their descendants lost control of their land. We know that this happened because several inscriptions have been found relating to stewards of estates (like the character in Luke 16). These show that land ownership had changed from the initial wide distribution among the veterans to more concentrated patterns of landholding, which no doubt included some use of slave labour on farms, replacing the previous Roman peasants. A consequence of this will have been to add some Romans ex-farmers to the numbers of craftworkers and other service providers. A further group of craftworkers, etc, will have been freed slaves.

There would still have been very few Greeks citizens. The main mechanism for becoming a citizen, by holding a city magistracy, was only open to the wealthy, and Greeks seem to have disappeared from among the wealthy elite, presumably because they lost their land. Eloquent testimony to the basic social pattern of Philippi between colonisation and the end of the second century AD is provided by the inscriptions. Almost all of the elite political and honorific ones are in Latin and relate to Romans. The Romans build the forum and the impressive temples. The Greeks, in contrast, can be glimpsed in places such as the stone-masons marks used in constructing the temples.

Paul's Audience, their Situation and the Letter

There were plenty of Greek-speaking Philippians. Peter Pilhofer, the leading current historian of the Philippi of Paul's day, argues that Romans were never in a majority in the town. However, there was a substantial number of Romans and we would expect the church to have contained a mixture of both groups, which is in fact what we find in the list of names in Philippians and Acts. Given this mixture of Greek non-citizens and Roman citizens, both of the possibilities for interpreting Phil. 3.20, that we considered above, come into play. So does a third. By stressing that all the Philippian Christians share a citizenship which is much more valuable than the Roman one, which some have but some do not, Paul may be seeking to help unity among the Christians. This would make 3.20 contribute to the call to unity that runs right through the letter (e.g., 1.27; 2.1-4; 4.2-3).

We know from Philippians that the Christians there were suffering in some way for their faith. Paul writes, '...it has been granted to you, on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake' (Phil. 1.29). They also seem to have been in a difficult economic situation. In 2 Corinthians 8.1-3, Paul encourages the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the Judaeon churches by citing the example of the Macedonian churches, who gave generously despite extreme poverty. 'We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means' (NRSV). The three churches that we know of in Macedonia are those at Philippi,

Thessalonica and Beroea. We know from Phil. 4.10-20 that the Philippians gave money to Paul so it seems fairly certain that they are least part of the people referred to in 2 Cor. 8.

It seems likely that there would have been some degree of connection between the Philippians' suffering and their poverty. They may well have been fairly poor when they became Christians: with a few likely exceptions in Corinth, Paul's churches seem generally to have drawn from the poorer end of society (see, e.g., the reference to the Thessalonians working with their hands, 1 Thess. 4.11). However, any suffering that the Philippians underwent would probably have made their economic situation substantially worse. First-century society was very much a matter of personal networks that were essential for economic life. When Philippians abandoned the religious practice of their families, trades, city or empire, this will have had a cost in terms of weakening or breaking some of the networks. A Christian man might have had to leave a religion-based club that he was part of (such as the *cultores* of the god Silvanus, who are listed on two large inscriptions cut into the rocks at the base of the acropolis at Philippi). A Christian woman might be divorced for refusing to take a leading role in domestic worship (cf. 1 Cor. 7.15). More broadly, it can be seen throughout history that maybe the most consistent long-term effects of persecution are seen in economic disadvantages to the persecuted group.

Such a connection between suffering and economics would fit well with the connection that Philippians makes between suffering and the call to unity. Paul's main exhortation of his audience probably runs from 1.27 – 4.1. He begins it with the hope that they will be 'standing firm, in one spirit, striving together with one soul for the faith of the gospel' (1.27). He ends it by concluding, 'So, my brothers [and sisters] ... thus stand firm in the Lord' (4.1). As we can see in 1.27, the call to stand firm is immediately linked in with unity. This goes further as Paul expounds his exhortation in 2.1-4. 'Fill up my joy by being in agreement, having the same love, being together in soul, thinking the one thing' (2.2). This over-the-top rhetoric on unity is then made more specific. 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but, in humility, consider each other as more important than yourselves, not looking to your own interests but actually to those of each other' (2.3-4). This call is then backed up by appeal to the example of Jesus, who lowered himself, was faithful through to death, and was then exalted by God (2.5-11).

It seems to me that this would all function as a call for mutual practical help in their situation of suffering. There is also an implied call for willingness to risk loss of status. In the first century, humility had more of a connotation of low social status than it does now. Jesus' self-lowering in the incarnation and his self-humbling as a man are put particularly strongly. There is also an implied call for willingness to suffer further, if necessary, and even to die. All this would work well as a practical exhortation to a poor, suffering church.

However, how would the description of the exaltation of Christ (2.9-11) function for such an audience, since it would be hard to see this as some sort of example? Two things strike me as going on. First, there is actually a bit of an example here. The suffering Philippians see their leader, Jesus, going through suffering and then being exalted. Even though they would not expect to occupy Christ's throne, they would expect that their suffering for his sake would also end in some glorious destiny. Second, we come back to the Roman context. Christ is portrayed as the ultimate emperor, with the whole universe bowing to him. Although the portrayal is an allusion to Isaiah 45.23, and thus represents God's sovereignty over the universe coming to fruition in the enthronement of Christ, the theology does not remove the fact that this is pictured in terms of submission of many nations to an emperor. At this point, some scholars accuse Paul of re-inscribing imperial imagery into Christianity. In a sense this is true. However, it is done in such a way as to relativise actual emperors and their status. For the Greek-speaking Philippian Christians in the Roman colony of Philippi, the only emperor that will spring to mind is that of Rome. Philippian society is run by Rome according to Roman norms of behaviour. When Christ is portrayed as outdoing the Roman emperor, one key effect is to make the norms set by Christ more weighty than those of Roman society. Unity, mutual support and faithfulness under suffering trump first-century social norms of competition, status preservation, and the avoidance of people who have been in trouble with the authorities. Paul's depiction of the exaltation of Christ has much to offer in backing up his call to unity and standing firm for the gospel.

Further Reading

For a fuller academic presentation of much of this see *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

For German readers, the best current book on Philippi at the time of Paul is Peter Pilhofer, *Philippi I: Die erste christliche Gemeinde Europas* (Mohr Siebeck, 1995). Volume 2 is a magnificent interim collection of inscriptions. Pictures of many of these are available at www.philippoi.de.

A good general commentary is Marcus Bockmuehl, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (A&C Black, 1997).

Also good is Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Eerdmans, 1995), although I am not persuaded by his tying of the letter's Roman imagery with the idea that the Philippian Christians are suffering specifically because of refusal to participate in the imperial cult.

I also made reference to:

Adrian N. Sherwin-White, , *The Roman Citizenship* (Clarendon, 1973 edn);

Appian, *The Civil Wars*, III-V, tr. H. White (Loeb Vol IV; Heinemann, 1913).

Corinth off the Rocks: Archaeological Evidence and Corinthian Christianity

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Harvesting archaeological evidence in order to supplement literary sources requires the exploration of both ancient buildings and extant non-literary sources such as inscriptions and coins. Rightly used, they can be invaluable for understanding more of the ancient world. The harvesting of these sources for Biblical studies has long been recognized as important.

However, Richard E. DeMaris has shown how archaeological evidence can be inappropriately used and thereby cloud our understanding of early Christianity in Corinth. In spite of his justified criticisms, his own contribution falls somewhat short of expectations given his title, "Cults and the Imperial Cult in Early Roman Corinth: Literary vs. Material Record".¹ He devotes only two paragraphs to the material evidence of the imperial cult and then restricts them to identifying Temple E as the place for imperial cultic activities.² He bypassed two critical official inscriptions as well as Corinthian coins that are highly informative for the understanding of imperial cultic activities.

The first inscription reveals that imperial veneration had long been celebrated on its numerous high and holy days in the imperial calendar. The other records a highly significant development in imperial cultic activities in late A.D. 54 that caused considerable problems for Christians after Paul left this Roman colony. These were first published as long ago as 1926 and 1965³ and, as official sources, can be given greater weight when evaluating evidence over extant literary ones.

In order to show how archaeological evidence can help illuminate early Corinthian Christianity, it is intended in this article to explore two inscriptions and coins relating to imperial cultic activities that throw important light on reclining at a particular feast in the idol temple in which some Corinthian Christians participated (8:10) and to examine eleven almost identically worded inscriptions erected to the person who was officially in charge of the grain supply because of famines in Corinth and its relationship to 'the present difficulties' (7:25).⁴

I. The promotion of civic imperial cultic activities

Evidence of local imperial cultic activities from c. A.D. 1

There is an inscription which records the enthusiastic promotion of imperial cultic activities in cities of Achaëa. Price regards this inscription as 'the best documented case of an initiative of a Roman governor'.⁵ From it we learn that half a century before Paul arrived in Corinth, city-based imperial cultic sacrifices and events were being vigorously promoted and officially celebrated in many cities in Achaëa, including Corinth. This was due to the work of Publius Cornelius Scipio, a Roman senator, one of Rome's

two consuls in 17 B.C. and the leading Roman official in his day in Achaea c. A.D. 1 who would have been located in Corinth.

Secretary of the council was Philoxenidas in the magistracy of Theodoros. Decree: Since Publius Cornelius Scipio, *quaestor* with *pro praetorian* power, with unexcelled goodwill toward Augustus and all his house, having made one great and honourable vow to guard him against all harm, as displayed by each of his deeds, has conducted the Games of Caesar and has omitted no expense or honours, nor the thanksgiving on behalf of the sacrifice to Augustus, at the same time thanksgiving to the gods, preparing most of the cities of the province to do the very same thing along with him; and when he learned that Gaius, the son of Caesar, involved in battle against the barbarians on behalf of all men, was in good health, had escaped the dangers, and had taken vengeance on the enemy, with exuberant joy at this best news he instructed everyone both to wear wreaths and to sacrifice on undisturbed days, and he himself both sacrificed oxen for the safety of Gaius and gave a variety of (theatrical) performances, zealous to make them rival those given in the past on one hand, and on the other to preserve equally the revered status (of Gaius); he omitted two days from 'the days of Augustus' and made the beginning of the sacrifices on behalf Gaius from the day on which for the first time he was designated consul and ordered us to celebrate this day each year with sacrifices and the wearing of wreaths as joyfully as we are able, and the council-members decreed on the fifteenth day before the Calendars of [——].⁶

Scipio was the *quaestor* and normally would have been involved in Rome's financial affairs but with the expansion of the Roman empire this official handled funds at a provincial level. It was in this capacity that Scipio was proactive in enthusiastically promoting the imperial cultic veneration in cities in that province. As a leading Roman official he would not have done so if he knew that his endeavours in this regard did not carry the imperial imprimatur.

Gaius, one of two named successors of Augustus, was a central figure in Scipio's promotion of the cult. Dio records that—

Agrippa [the son-in-law of Augustus] again acknowledged the birth of a son who was named Lucius; Augustus immediately adopted him together with his brother Gaius, not waiting for them to become men, but appointing them then and there successors in his office, in order that fewer plots might be formed against him.⁷

The citizens of Rome had shown their support of Augustus by choosing Gaius as consul in 16 B.C. when he was but fourteen years old and had just assumed the mantle of manhood (*toga virilis*). Gold coins of Augustus depicted his adopted sons (actually grandsons), Gaius and Lucius Caesar, shown with honorific shields and spears. The inscription/coin identifies them as 'sons of Augustus, consuls designate, and leaders of youth (*principes iuventutis*)'— and deferred Gaius taking up the consulship until A.D. 1 when he reached 21 years. He was given a priesthood and permitted to attend

meetings of the Senate in Rome.⁸ This information means that the inscription can be dated between 6 B.C. when Gallio was 'designated consul' and A.D. 1 when he assumed the office as consul because of the use of the term 'designated'. It is possible to date the inscription from details concerning Gaius to *c.* 1 A.D. Not only Rome honoured him but the province of Achaëa did also.

Scipio provided for a sacrifice for the safety of Gaius against enemies of the empire. This reflected his endorsement of Gaius as a successor of Augustus. The nexus between political loyalty to Augustus and his household and imperial cultic activities that aimed at preserving their safety was set out for all in Achaëa to see.

More significantly for our understanding of cultic activities is the recording of different imperial sacrifices in this one inscription. There were sacrifices to the gods 'for' the safety of Gaius' *l.* 15—the sacrifice of an ox was very much a Roman custom—and sacrifices on 'behalf of' Gaius. Earlier there was 'the thanksgiving for the sacrifice to Augustus', and 'thanksgiving to the gods at the same time' *ll.* 8 and 9.⁹ A similar inscription from Sardis also makes reference to the two imperial cultic practices concerning prayers to Augustus and prayers and sacrifices for Gaius to the gods. As in the Messene inscription, they occur together.¹⁰

Scipio not only commanded sacrifices but he actually adjusted the many high and holy days in the official annual imperial cultic calendar in the province. He did this by omitting 'two days from the days of Augustus and makes the beginning of the sacrifices for Gaius from the day on which for the first time he was designated consul'. Scipio's promotion of the cause of Gaius is not to be seen as in any way detracting from Augustus but rather affirming his place in the Augustine succession and hence the imperial cultic celebrations.

He also instructs all to wear crowns—for the same celebrations in Sardis all in 'their brightest clothing shall wear wreaths'.¹¹ They were to offer sacrifices, and to 'keep themselves free from work' for the important imperial high and holy day. The celebrations were therefore intended not just for the ruling élite but for all the inhabitants of the cities of the province.'

The Messene inscription contains a wealth of information about 'the Games of Caesar' and imperial cult activities. It confirms our understanding of its seemingly contradictory characteristics, all of which are comfortably recorded in this document issued by the officials of that city. Sacrifices to the emperor and to the gods for the emperor's son did not detract from the numerous imperial holidays for sacrificing to Augustus.

Scipio used his office to see the cult fully promoted and firmly established province-wide, for we are told he was 'preparing most of the cities of the province to do the very same thing along with him'. This is a rich inscription recording the shaping of the celebrations in Achaëan cities, including the centre of government in the province, *i.e.*, Corinth.

Evidence of a new Federal Imperial Cult in Corinth

In late A.D. 54 a major imperial cult ‘upgrade’ occurred in Corinth—the sort that cities in Roman provinces in the East fought tooth and nail to secure. The forerunner to this new development in the imperial cult had been the celebration by the Panachaean assembly of imperial festivals on the accession of both Gaius and Claudius.¹² A provincial imperial cult or, to be more technically correct, a federal one was instituted because the cities involved were part of the ancient federal Achaean league.¹³

The first high priest of the federal imperial cult was the great Corinthian benefactor, Gaius Julius Spartiaticus. He was honored with a statue by the Corinthian tribe of Calpurnian because of it. The accompanying inscription was published in 1926.¹⁴

Gaius Julius Spartiaticus, son of Laco, grandson of Eurycles, of the Fabian tribe, procurator of Caesar and the Augusta Agrippina, military tribune, decorated with the public horse by the deified Claudius, *flamen* of the Deified Julius, twice magistrate of the fifth year (*quinquennial duovir*), president of the Isthmian and Caesarean Sebasteian games, high priest for life of the Augustan house, the first of the Achaeans to hold this office on account of his excellence and unsparing and most lavish generosity both to the divine family (*domus divina*)¹⁵ and to our colony: the tribesmen of the Calpurnian tribe (set up this statue) for their patron.¹⁶

The occupant of the federal high priesthood had to be ‘the most distinguished available candidate of the day’, for it was ‘the summit of a man’s career’ in the East.¹⁷ Certainly, in his day no person could have matched that requirement better than Spartiaticus. His grandfather was Euryclea, the famous Spartan dynast after whom baths in Corinth were named. It was one of the sights of Corinth recorded by Pausanias.¹⁸ His father, C. Julius Laco belonged to one of the leading families in Achaea and had long ties with Corinth’s political life. His own inscription records that he held some of the public offices that his son would subsequently occupy.¹⁹

To be an imperial priest was a mark of distinction, as was true of priesthoods in general, according to Artemidorus (II, 30), while to be a provincial priest was the pinnacle of achievement. A Roman astrologer, Firmicus Maternus counts such dignitaries of the province of Asia among those famed throughout the world.²⁰

This would be no less true of this office in the prestigious Roman colony of Corinth.

The inscription records the career of a very important player in Achaea who had been made a member of the Equestrian order—‘decorated with the public horse by the deified Claudius’.²¹ Spartiaticus became ‘president of the Isthmian and Caesarean Sebasteian games’. The sheer cost of financing these imperial games in nearby Isthmia meant its presidency became the most senior of the annual liturgies in Corinth to which one could be elected by popular vote.²²

Another office that would become highly important in Corinth and the federation, i.e. 'high priest of the Augustan house for life' (*Sebasteon, archiere domus Aug. in perpetuum*) was added. It is clear that Spartiacus was 'the first of the Achaeans to hold this office' (*primo Achaeon*). From his native city of Sparta it is recorded that he was the 'high priest of the Caesars', while another from Athens further clarifies that he was the first from the time of its institution. He was 'the high priest of the divine Caesars and the divine family of the Achaean league, first [high priest] for life from its institution'. In fact the word order stresses he was the first to hold this most prestigious and life-long office.²³

His tribe praised him as patron with the following accolades, 'his excellence and unsparing and most lavish generosity' and then indicated that the beneficiaries of these were 'both to the divine family (*domus divina*) and in our colony'. The former phrase was seen as 'an elastic term that included all the members of the Imperial house'.²⁴

The inscription honouring Spartiacus helps date the creation of the imperial federal cult because he held the office of 'procurator of Caesar and the Augusta Agrippina'. This refers to his responsibility for the administration of the private estates of the emperor in the province. The naming of Nero's mother, Agrippina II helps dates this inscription and its celebration of the inauguration of the federal imperial cult in Corinth.

Claudius had died on 13th October, 54 and was immediately deified by the Senate and Nero was designated as 'son of the Deified' [Claudius]. Commemorative coins were struck recording Augusta Agrippina was his priestess.²⁵ In an *aureus* minted in Rome in late A.D. 54—the coin of highest value in Roman currency and worth 25 *denarii*—the obverse side of the coin showed Nero and his mother facing each other, so that neither is subordinate to the other.²⁶ It read 'Agrippina Augusta (wife) of the deified Claudius, mother of Nero Caesar' (Obverse): 'To Nero, son of the deified Claudius, Caesar Augustus Germanicus, emperor, of tribunician power; in accordance with a decree of the senate' (Reverse). It was unprecedented to have the mother of a reigning emperor appearing facing him and the senate issuing such a coin.²⁷ This was to inform Rome of her position as *de facto* 'co-regent' with her son whose accession occurred three months before his seventeenth birthday.²⁸ Because Corinth was a clone of Rome, the creation of a provincial cult that required the approval of Rome's Senate was a politically astute move by the Achaean League, given that Nero wished to be known as the son of a 'deified emperor'.

Claudius died in October of A.D. 54 possibly having been poisoned by Agrippina. Earlier in that year he had adopted Nero. That year also saw another coin struck in Corinth with two full-length males, Nero and Britannicus—the latter was the actual son of Claudius and was subsequently poisoned on 11th February, A.D. 55 possibly by Agrippina II in order to secure further Nero's position as emperor. Other Corinthian coins named her 'Agrippina Augusta' and 'Julia Agrippina Augusta, mother of Caesar'. They were issued after Nero's accession.²⁹

In the Principate of Nero numerous coins were struck bearing her image. In Synaus there is one on the obverse side with a draped Agrippina on the right facing the bare head of Nero reading 'Agrippina, goddess, Nero, god' and thus attributing divinity to both. On the reverse side is the god to whom Augustus had attributed a major victory and whom he venerated, Apollo, who was depicted firing an arrow.³⁰

Nero would subsequently and abruptly strip his mother of her power because she sought to run his empire. She was removed from the palace proper to a house owned by her grandmother on the Palatine in Rome.³¹ Miriam Griffin has argued that 'her [Agrippina's] control of the business of government ceased at the end of 54'.³² Nero not only did this and had her removed from his imperial residence but also attempted to have her murdered. With the poisoning of Britannicus, Nero no longer felt the need of his mother. This means that no official inscription would have been voted in a Roman colony containing her name after her fall from power, given Corinth's sensitivities to Rome's imperial politics.³³ In late A.D. 54 the federal imperial cult would have been created permanently in Corinth and annual celebrations attended by all the representatives of the Achaean League. So our inscription can be dated from November A.D. 54 with a *terminus ad quem* in early A.D. 55.

There are two coins struck by the magistrates of Corinth that show the temple where the imperial cult celebrations were held. The first coin shows that it is the tetrastyle temple within which Nero is standing and on the obverse side he is being crowned by the Tyche. The other coin from A.D. 69 shows the same temple seen from the corner.³⁴

So the two inscriptions discussed above show the vigor of the imperial cult's celebrations in Corinth, and in particular with the establishing of the provincial-wide activities in late A.D. 54. It is suggested that this highly significant development occurred after Paul departed and hence the nascent Christian community was in uncharted territory as he had given no apostolic ruling on the appropriateness in limitations to participating in this new imperial celebration with its games, wild beast shows and feasts (11:2). Hence they needed to write seeking his urgent ruling (8:1,4), given that some Christians had reclined at a feast held in the precincts of the imperial cult temple that overshadowed the Corinthian forum.

Paul refers to 'the so-called gods in heaven and on earth' (8:5). The *Hermetic Writings* reflect the Pauline convention when it refers to 'neither other so-called gods...only God'. Tertullian, the Christian apologist (c. A.D. 150-222) wrote that 'the so-called gods are of course mere names', for they are not divine.³⁵ The old English term 'commonly' meaning 'popularly but incorrectly' serves as a comparable example for this Greek conventional phrase.³⁶ In the clause 'for even though there are the so-called gods', means that Paul is separating the latter from the former reference and indicating members of the imperial family are erroneously designated 'gods'. Therefore the description of the gods 'so-called' does not mean that Paul was acknowledging their divinity or the emperors claimed it but rather that they were popularly but erroneously so designated.

With the coming of the Federal Imperial cult and the enormous celebrations association with provincial imperial cultic activities, some Christians in Corinth who possessed the right had rationalized their participation—‘we know that an idol is nothing’ and ‘there is only one god’ so why should we not recline in the idol temple because it is our ‘right’ (8:4, 9). The two inscriptions help substantially in identifying the nature of the cultic celebrations held in Corinth to which Paul responded at length in his letter, i.e., 8:1-11:1.

II. The Crisis of the Corinthian Grain Shortage³⁷

Inscriptions help clarify the enigmatic phrase ‘the present difficulties’ (7:25) to which Paul refers in the context of issues the Corinthian Christians raised concerning marriage (7:1, 25). We have unprecedented evidence in the ancient world of eleven almost identically worded Corinthian inscriptions erected to one person who was officially in charge of the grain supply. It was not only the ‘Council and the People’ who erected a statue to him with the inscription on the plinth, but each of the Tribes of the city did the same.

To Tiberius Claudius Dinippus, son of Publius, of the tribe Fabia, who was *duovir*, *duovir quinquennalis*, *augur*, priest of the Britannic Victory, Military Tribune of Hispanic Legion VI, chief engineer three times, curator of the grain supply (*curator annonae*), President of the Neronea Caesarean and of the Isthmian and Caesarean games³⁸

The office of ‘curator of the grain supply’ was only filled in the face of a famine when the grain crops failed. It was not an annually elected office for which one would nominate for election. The person elected was responsible for securing grain and providing a subsidy to lower the cost or to provide grain free of charge for distribution to citizens, i.e., a grain dole. The city authorities knew that even the rumour of a possible famine could cause riots in the cities and there is evidence of the houses of the rich being plundered or burnt by the ‘have-nots’.

While there is evidence that on other occasions this office was filled in Corinth and elsewhere, never have we found a case where all the Tribes of city officially honoured the person, along with the Council and the People.

Paul uses the term ‘difficulties’ which was associated with famines; therefore we have a situation of a sustained grain shortage that caused the Christians to ask about marriage issues, and those betrothed to ask whether they should marry or not at that time. Here, as in more recent times of war, such issues become a matter of uncertainty. In the case of Christian couples, Paul gives advice regarding the boundaries for abstaining from the marriage bed. They are to be only for prayer and fasting, only by mutual consent and then for a period because of the temptations of abstinence (7:2-5). He uses their question to deal with other marriage situations (7:6-16) arguing on the basis of the divinely ordained *status quo*, except for slavery (7:14-24).

Betrothal in the ancient world was a binding arrangement for marriage or divorce were the only options, as in the case of Mary and Joseph and some Asian cultures today. Young men wrote asking if they should marry now, or if they should defer the day (7:25). Paul gives no binding rulings but draws the parameters around which the decision should be made. For the ancient world, where marriage was everything, Paul indicates that the Christians should now have a worldview that means marriage, sorrow, joy and making money are not everything in the seasons of life. His view of the coming of Christ on God's appointed day conflicts with the first-century view of the eternity of the world, hence this starting point in helping the young men to resolve the issue (7:28-31). He proceeds to discuss Christian service and the undivided focus that not being married provides in contrast to the obligation to care for the welfare of a spouse which requires monocular focus (7:32-38). The two scenarios are placed before young men: those whose pacing of the relationship has been hasty resulting in sexual improprieties and those who have been restrained (7:36-38).

1 Corinthians 7 is a much misunderstood chapter. In all of Paul's letters it is the longest discussion on marriage. Aspects which have been enigmatic in the past become explicable in the light of the important archaeological evidence of the role of Tiberius Claudius Dinippus as curator of the grain supply, as indeed does the issue of the 'have-nots' at the Lord's Supper, i.e., those who have nothing (11:22).

Faith and thought do go together and what comes off the rocks can play a definitive role in this important Christian endeavour.

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30 FAITH AND THOUGHT

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